



North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation
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Michael F. Easley
 Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
 Secretary, DENR

MOST PARKS POST ATTENDANCE GAIN

(Complete 2006 visitation statistics are on Page 7.)

Visitation increased at 24 of the state's 33 state parks and state recreation areas during 2006. The state parks system recorded a total 12.67 million visits during the year, up 1 percent from 12.57 million visits in 2005.

Seven parks reported visitation increased 15 percent or more over 2005 levels. They are Jockey's Ridge, Lake James, Lumber River, Merchants Millpond, Medoc Mountain, Mount Mitchell and New River.

Attendance at state parks is tracked by the use of traffic counters at access points, a method similar to that used by the National Park Service and a standard model for outdoor recreation sites.

The attendance figure for the parks system's 90th Anniversary year was among the highest in its



Hikers join the crowd at William B. Umstead State Park on a recent Saturday morning.

history, and roughly two and a half times higher than 25 years ago. The record for attendance at state parks was set in 2002 with 13.2 million recorded visits.

"Attendance at state parks throughout the

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PARKS' LAND PROJECTS AT RECORD LEVEL

The land acquisition program of the state parks system has grown dramatically in recent years in size, scope and complexity, all in the face of a highly volatile real estate market in North Carolina.

Currently, more than 200 active projects are managed by land acquisition specialists at the Division of Parks and Recreation with help from their partners among land conservancies and land trusts. That number more than doubled in just two years.

In 2006, the parks system completed 45 land transactions, adding 5,075 acres to 20 state parks and state natural areas. By comparison, in 1994 there were just 10 transactions.

The state parks system is trying to do its

share as part of the Million Acre Initiative, which calls for the state to protect and preserve that many acres of land and water by 2009. The initiative has protected about 405,000 acres so far.

"One of the major issues is obviously the cost of property is going up and there is not enough conservation funding in order for us to meet our million acre goal," said Richard Rogers, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' assistant secretary for natural resources.

The pace of negotiations still is overmatched by the speed at which farmland and timberland is being developed, said Jeff Masten of the Triangle Land Conservancy.

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UP CLOSE AND 'PERSONNEL'

Harry Lee Edwards

retired after 28 years as a ranger at Lake Waccamaw State Park. A native of Columbus County, Edwards grew up at Lake Waccamaw and was the park's closest neighbor when it was established in 1976.

After earning a degree in environmental sciences from

UNC-Wilmington and working for a short time for the Town of Lake Waccamaw, he was hired as the park's first ranger, with responsibility for patrolling the park, permitting structures on the lake and maintaining the park's road, trails and facilities. For a time, his home served as the park's headquarters.

During Edwards' tenure, the state park grew from 273 to 1,756 acres, adding a campground, visitor center, boardwalks, trail network and interpretive and education programs.

Phoebe Wahab, a

senior ranger at Goose Creek State Park, retired after 23 years with the state parks system. Wahab grew up in Tarboro and graduated from N.C. State University in 1977, majoring in natural resource recreation management and conservation. After seasonal experience with the National Park Service, she joined the division in 1983 at Carolina Beach State Park, and moved to Goose Creek in 1996.

She was instrumental in building interpretive and environmental education programs at both state parks and was involved with programs at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

Wahab, who lives in Bath with her husband and two children, intends to study criminal justice technology at Pitt Community College.

Julia Hinnant has

joined the staff of Jordan Lake State Recreation Area as an office assistant. She is a graduate of Northwood High School in Pittsboro and attended Louisburg College and Wake Technical Community College.

Lance Huss is a new

park ranger at South Mountains State Park. He has three years experience as an officer with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and prior to that, was a seasonal employee at the park. He is a 1997 graduate of East Burke High School and holds a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from Montreat College.

From The Director's Desk

We can't consider attendance at our state parks as the only measure of our success. Other elements, such as the quality of the experiences of visitors, the level of stewardship of our natural resources and the development of our environmental education initiatives are extremely important. Nonetheless, attendance has remained very strong in recent years, hovering near 13 million recorded visits (officially 12.67 million in 2006). And, that certainly indicates we're meeting a need in North Carolina.

Our attendance is approaching three times what it was three decades ago. In part, it's a reflection of the state's growing population. But, it's also obvious that the state parks are attracting a more diverse population with a wider range of needs, expectations and recreational tastes. Our visitors are coming up with new ways to use the state parks, particularly as urban development moves closer to their boundaries.

All of this brings some tremendous challenges, not only inside the parks for rangers and park staff but throughout the division as we make plans for the future. It's good to be aware of the trends and be ready to respond.

You'll also notice in *The Steward* this month an overview of the parks system's land acquisition program. It has grown significantly in size and complexity within the past decade. There are currently more than 200 active projects and in 2006, we had a record 45 land transactions, which added 5,075 acres to the state parks.

The current real estate market is presenting us with tremendous opportunities along with new challenges. The governor and the General Assembly are responding with proposals for supplementing the state's three conservation trust funds as well as the Farmland Preservation Trust Fund. So, it's more important than ever to give keen attention to our land acquisition program and to further develop our partnerships with land trusts and conservancies.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

STOKES RETIRES AFTER 26-YEAR CAREER

The Great Dismal Swamp is a place notorious for its wildlife, biting insects and challenging terrain choked with plant life. But, it has been skill at managing people that accounts for the high regard that the Dismal Swamp State Natural Area enjoys in the community.

That was the opinion of colleagues who credited Park Superintendent Henry Stokes as they gathered in Edenton Feb. 27 to note Stokes' retirement.

Camden County is looking with great anticipation to the public opening of the 14,700-acre park with a new visitor center and amenities.

The start of construction this winter followed years of wrangling over permits for a bridge across the Dismal Swamp Canal and long meetings with contractors and a citizens park advisory committee.

Stokes presided over all of that with just the right personality, said William Berry, the retired east district superintendent for the state parks system.

"I think Stokes was the right person at the right place and at the right time for Dismal Swamp. His footprint will be on the park forever," Berry said.

Stokes speaks the language of Camden County where the park is located, having been raised with the same broad Down East accent just down the road in Hertford. He retired after a 26-year career with the Division of Parks and Recreation, including almost four years as superintendent at Dismal Swamp.

Stokes is a graduate of Albemarle Academy in Elizabeth City and East Carolina University with a bachelor's degree in parks and recreation management.



The group honoring Stokes in Edenton included a number of state parks retirees.



Susan Tillotson, chief of operations, presents Stokes, right, his certificate of retirement.

After serving as a seasonal ranger at William B. Umstead State Park, he joined the system full time in 1980 as a ranger at Jockey's Ridge State Park. At that time, the park's office was an unheated trailer. Stokes and Superintendent George Barnes used to wait for phone calls from Raleigh in the park's only truck with the heater running and the window cracked to listen for the ring.

Stokes moved to Pettigrew State Park in 1982, serving as a Ranger II for 10 years. He was promoted to Ranger III at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area in 1992.

While at Kerr Lake, Stokes managed the Nutbush recreation area, which was normally filled with area residents who had a strong proprietary interest in their neighborhood campground, said Susan Tillotson, herself a native of the area and now chief of operations.

"They'd allow a ranger to check on them once in awhile," Tillotson said wryly. "Really good people skills were necessary. If you didn't have them, you had to learn them really quickly."

Stokes honed his natural diplomatic skills at that park, Tillotson said, and that helped prepare him for the challenges at Dismal Swamp.

Tim Aydtlett of Elizabeth City, a member of the park's advisory committee and of the Parks and Recreation Authority, said Stokes carried on the spirit of community and determination that helped convince the state to buy acreage at Dismal Swamp in the 1970s.

"Congratulations on these many years of service to North Carolina," he told Stokes. "And, congratulations on bearing with us these last four years."

LAND PROGRAM

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"We have to be more creative in terms of our options and take more risks. We're competing with those who have cash in hand," Masten said.

The best estimate of the conversion rate of farmland and timberland to development is about 100,000 acres a year. The state's Million Acres Initiative – begun in 1999 with a 10-year target – has managed to conserve about 405,000 acres. So, the rate of development is about twice that of conservation.

The state parks system has identified about \$153 million in land acquisition needs just to fulfill the master plans of the 29 existing parks, with four new parks under development. That represents hundreds of potential transactions.

The 45 transactions in 2006, representing an investment of \$40 million from the state's three conservation trust funds, were the most in one year in the history of the state parks system, although more land (7,915 acres) was added in 1999 when Gorges State Park was dedicated.

(The recent decision to buy Chimney Rock Park to add to a developing state park in Hickory Nut Gorge is not included in this update, as the sale will close during 2007.)

Of those purchases, 41 were 200 acres or less and as small as a quarter-acre lot added to Jockey's Ridge State Park. The largest was nearly 1,000 acres of the World's Edge property at Hickory Nut Gorge.

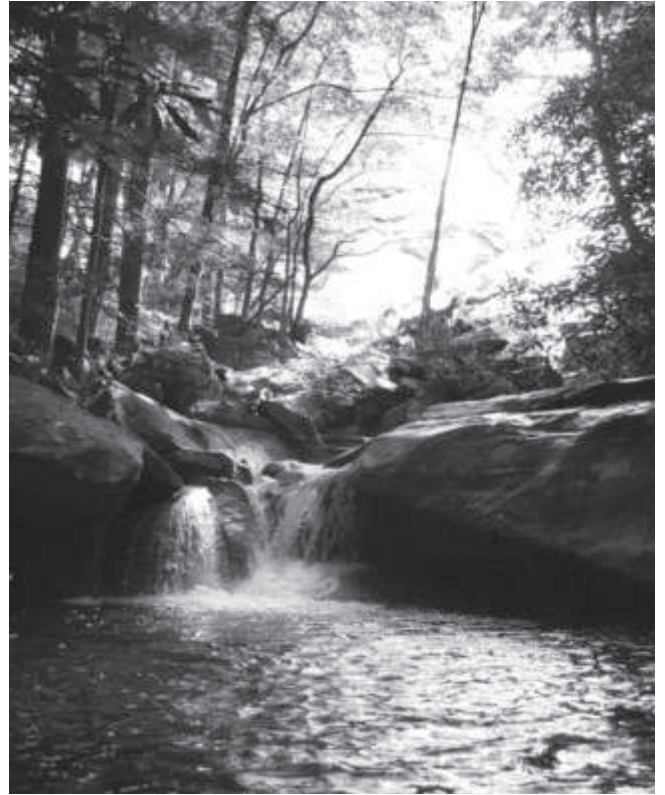
Sue Regier, head of the parks system's land acquisition program, said the principal reason for the surge in activity is the maturing of the trust funds – Parks and Recreation, Clean Water Management and Natural Heritage – which has provided a steady revenue stream for conservation in the state.

A secondary factor is the amount of land coming onto the market as corporations divest large land holdings and a generation of farmers leaves land to heirs.

"With the trust funds, we can start working on a land project before we have funding in place," Regier said. "That allows us to work with willing sellers as they appear, where so often in the past, we worked only on priority projects."

The faster pace of the real estate market pushes the state parks system to look for new efficiencies.

Initial contact with landowners, appraisals and some negotiations often can take place beforehand, as the division prepares grant proposals for



The World's Edge tract at Hickory Nut Gorge was put on the market by family heirs and has very high natural resource value.

the trust funds.

To help with the workload, the parks system and the State Property Office have further developed partnerships with land conservancies and trusts across the state.

The conservancies identify key properties and sometimes contract with the State Property Office to help with negotiations. That's beyond their traditional practice of buying land and later re-selling or donating it to the state.

"It requires more coordination, but we do get more done," Regier said. "The land trusts are getting better at what they do."

In past decades, the state parks system regularly worked with four organizations – The Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, the Eno River Association and the National Committee for the New River. The list of partners has now grown to more than a dozen.

Despite this network and the health of the trust funds, resources for land conservation are strained.

If all 200 active projects of the state parks were immediately successful – an unlikely prospect

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LAND PROGRAM

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– the cost would be more than \$100 million, far outstripping the annual support of the trust funds.

The governor's office and the General Assembly have taken notice of that gap and the opportunities for conservation.

Gov. Mike Easley's 2007-09 biennium budget proposal includes \$100 million to be funneled through the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds for conservation (beyond the expected \$100 million for the Clean Water Management Trust Fund).

And, a legislative panel has recommended generating \$1 billion in land preservation funds over the next five years. The Land and Water Study Commission was created last year after land conservation groups, organized as the Land for Tomorrow Coalition, asked for a bond issue to raise \$1 billion.

The study commission instead has suggested a mix of sales, food or income-tax hikes as well as development fees to raise the money.

The Land for Tomorrow Coalition insists that the timing is crucial with more than 300 acres a day being lost to development in North Carolina.

And each acre seems to be worth more on the market each day.

"If we doing an appraisal at the beginning of the calendar year, how much will that property value increase by the end of the calendar year?" Regier said.

She added that some in the conservation community expressed concern at paying \$10,000 per acre for the 1,600-acre World's Edge property at Hickory Nut Gorge, even though it has premier natural resource value.

But, \$10,000 per acre is now often consid-

ered the "floor" for mountain land prices, she said, and some nearby properties have sold for up to \$19,000 per acre.

"What's driving that is primarily second-home development," she said.

Revenues to the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds come from the state's tax on real estate sales. So, in a hot real estate market, more money is available for conservation. But, that can help create a price spiral.

Masten, the director of conservation strategies for the Triangle Land Conservancy for six years, has worked on many projects in Wake and surrounding counties. In suburban areas, it's often roads that drive prices, he said.

"New or improved roads expose land that before was considered too far for a daily drive to work," he said.

Market price for some land in Wake County has jumped 50 percent or more in one year, Masten said. Undeveloped land in adjacent Chatham County has recently sold for \$30,000 per acre, an unheard of price just a few years ago.

Land prices are soaring, particularly in the mountains and the coast, and property owners now are savvy about that, said Alton Philips of the State Property Office. For much of his 38 years in state government, Philips worked on land acquisitions for the state parks system.

"Sometimes we can't compete now unless we pay exorbitant prices," he said. "If you can either see or smell water from the land, so to speak, the price has shot up."

Philips said opportunities for conservation appear as families move from rural areas and heirs are willing to sell homesteads. But, that situation makes for complex and lengthy negotiations.

"Ten heirs can be scattered across the United States," Phillips said. "Trying to get those heirs together to agree on one property deal can be a nightmare sometimes. Nine can agree and there'll be one that doesn't."

In the past, the state has even bought nine-tenths interest in a property, hoping to eventually convince a lone heir to sell his share, he said.

For a family trying to satisfy conflicting aims of siblings, selling land for a state park can be a solution, Regier said. Very often, some heirs want the land to remain in a natural state and want to be able to revisit it, while the priority for others is a fair market price for their inheritance.



NEW VISITOR CENTER

Construction is progressing on a project to renovate and enlarge the visitor center at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. The project is supported by the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

ATTENDANCE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

country has remained strong in recent years, and that reflects that state parks are satisfying a basic desire for people to reconnect with the natural world,” said Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks system.

“Our visitors have many reasons for coming to the state parks in North Carolina. Our hope is that each one leaves with a sense of our mission of conservation, environmental education and providing quality recreation.”

The majority of the state parks saw increases in attendance ranging from 8-20 percent.

Mount Mitchell recorded the largest gain at 28 percent (289,087 visits). However, the increase was due largely to a sharp dip in 2005 visitation, when construction on the Blue Ridge Parkway severely limited access to the park. In past years, the park has recorded more than 600,000 visits.

Although it's the system's smallest state park at 389 acres, Fort Macon in Carteret County remained the busiest with 1.2 million recorded visits, followed closely by Jockey's Ridge at Nag's Head with 1.1 million visitors.

Construction is expected to begin soon on a new coastal environmental education center at Fort Macon, which will combine the functions of a visitor center with that of an expansive exhibit hall and teaching facility.

Another coastal park at Hammocks Beach saw visitation drop by 42 percent (77,379 visits) in 2006.

Superintendent Paul Donnelly said the park's access to its main feature, Bear Island, was severely hampered by shoaling in Cow Channel. That has forced the park to use smaller ferries to the island and to discontinue ferry service earlier in the day than usual when low tides or winds compound the problem.

The park is examining options for dredging the channel or developing other means of transportation.

Traditionally, the three state recreation areas on reservoirs – Jordan, Falls and Kerr lakes – are among the busiest parks. Jordan Lake recorded one million visitors during the year, and Falls Lake had 943,149.

Kerr Lake, however, recorded a drop of 29 percent, al-

though it was still quite busy with more than 1.1 million visitors.

Last year, the park established a daily parking fee of \$5 per car, consistent with fees charged at Jordan and Falls lakes. In recent years, more than \$14.5 million has been spent at the state recreation area to put its facilities on par with those at the other lakes.

“Several of our traditionally busy day-use areas were very quiet for much of last summer,” Superintendent Bryce Fleming said. “I think many folks were just turned off by having to pay for a service that had been free for 50 years.”

Fleming said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had a similar, and temporary, drop in use after it began charging fees in the early 1990s.

Traditionally, the state parks system ranks third among tourism destinations in the state, behind the Concord Mills shopping mall in Cabarrus County and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Blue Ridge Parkway reported a visitation increase from 17.8 million in 2005 to 18.9 million in 2006.

SCHOOL DAY ON THE DUNE

John Donlan, left, principal of Nag's Head Elementary School, presents a photo to George Barnes, superintendent of Jockey's Ridge State Park. The photo depicts the entire school population on the dune at the park, and was presented in appreciation for the park hosting the students for the day.

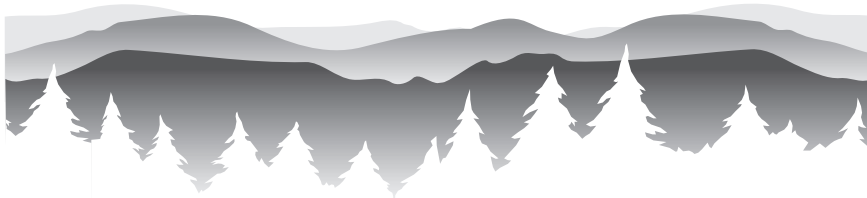


North Carolina State Parks

Monthly Attendance Report

December, 2006

NC STATE PARK	December 2006	TOTAL Dec-06	December 2005	TOTAL Dec-05	% CHANGE (2006/2005) Dec YTD	
Carolina Beach	23,004	495,682	17,296	478,128	33%	4%
Cliffs of the Neuse	4,089	106,347	3,922	94,212	4%	13%
Crowders Mountain	19,168	368,422	17,293	339,572	11%	8%
Dismal Swamp	0	0	0	0	-100%	-100%
Elk Knob	0	0	0	0	-100%	-100%
Eno River	18,172	311,396	14,175	312,982	28%	-1%
Falls Lake	16,730	943,149	13,502	877,566	24%	7%
Fort Fisher	22,220	623,849	22,506	626,921	-1%	-0%
Fort Macon	42,046	1,210,080	36,692	1,201,650	15%	1%
Goose Creek	8,904	154,318	8,705	142,637	2%	8%
Gorges	4,810	114,353	1,665	108,504	189%	5%
Hammocks Beach	3,741	77,379	4,815	133,719	-22%	-42%
Haw River	696	3,491	0	0	-100%	-100%
Hanging Rock	16,746	410,241	11,895	382,544	41%	7%
Jones Lake	1,881	67,390	4,772	81,086	-61%	-17%
Jordan Lake	63,991	1,052,256	15,846	1,453,261	304%	-28%
Jockey's Ridge	49,594	1,058,251	19,692	962,251	152%	10%
Kerr Lake	34,392	1,162,636	36,712	1,634,053	-6%	-29%
Lake James	33,764	680,110	12,901	398,168	162%	71%
Lake Norman	18,612	445,392	20,418	461,712	-9%	-4%
Lake Waccamaw	3,252	89,274	3,918	79,850	-17%	12%
Lumber River	7,664	83,986	6,460	68,829	19%	22%
Merchants Millpond	12,700	253,669	8,636	218,516	47%	16%
Medoc Mountain	2,200	55,185	1,650	47,170	33%	17%
Mount Jefferson	6,336	92,538	2,842	79,270	123%	17%
Mount Mitchell	4,560	289,087	676	226,039	575%	28%
Morrow Mountain	15,440	356,522	4,930	201,970	213%	77%
New River	3,460	185,335	8,286	145,656	-58%	27%
Oconeechee Mountain	3,720	56,536	2,408	30,184	54%	87%
Pettigrew	3,888	72,317	2,859	70,847	36%	2%
Pilot Mountain	18,077	396,522	13,050	396,539	39%	-0%
Raven Rock	4,986	98,151	4,293	105,903	16%	-7%
Singletary Lake	769	34,241	1,354	37,942	-43%	-10%
South Mountains	10,136	205,814	8,668	192,440	17%	7%
Stone Mountain	15,784	409,376	14,604	378,312	8%	8%
Weymouth Woods	4,362	46,719	3,308	43,435	32%	8%
William B. Umstead	32,158	596,793	22,008	560,379	46%	6%
SYSTEMWIDE	532,052	12,606,807	372,757	12,572,247	43%	0%



Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's **natural diversity**;
to provide and promote **outdoor recreation**
opportunities throughout North Carolina;
to exemplify and encourage **good stewardship**
of North Carolina's natural resources for all
citizens and visitors.

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SAFETY ZONE

PORTABLE GENERATORS DEMAND RESPECT

✓ Inspect generators before use for damage or loose fuel lines that might have resulted from transport.

✓ Always plug appliances directly into the generator using a heavy-duty, three-pronged cord with proper grounding.

✓ Never attach a generator directly to the electrical system of a structure without a properly installed transfer switch.

✓ Never operate a generator indoors or near windows, doors or vents leading into areas that are occupied.

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